

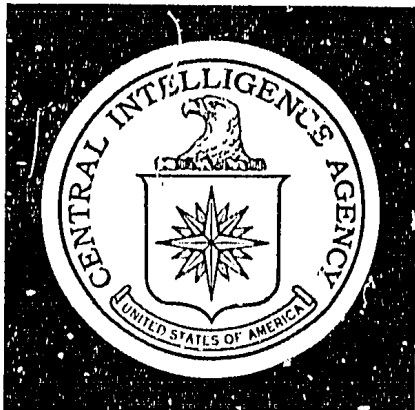
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BOARD OF
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM

The Nasser-Hussein "Alliance"

Secret

23 December 1968

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

23 December 1968

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 24-68

SUBJECT: The Nasser-Hussein "Alliance"*

SUMMARY

Since the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, two leaders often seen as symbols of the radical and conservative camps in Arab affairs, Nasser of Egypt and Hussein of Jordan, have put aside their long-standing hostility to enter into an alliance of convenience. This has been important in permitting them greater flexibility in dealing with Israel than either would have alone, and it strengthens each against those who would oppose any negotiations. Furthermore, their cooperation serves to mute inter-Arab tensions and promote the flow of subsidy payments from the rich Arab nations. For Nasser, this working arrangement is a means of sharing to some extent in the benefits of Hussein's special standing with the West. Good relations with Nasser help Hussein blunt challenges by radicals in the fedayeen movement and in the Palestinian and Jordanian populations at large. The alliance will remain uneasy and brittle, but it probably will endure as long as the two principals retain power and while circumstances persist that make cooperation serve their differing special interests.

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1. For the first 15 years of Hussein's reign in Jordan, relations between the Hashemite kingdom and the republican regime in Egypt ranged from polite to vitriolic, with the latter condition usually prevalent. Nasser made repeated attempts to bring about Hussein's downfall, directly or indirectly; anti-Nasser Arabs could almost always count on a friendly reception in Amman. In the period immediately after the June 1967 war, however, the two patched together a mutually advantageous cooperative arrangement; they have since been working together in surprising harmony. And, the seemingly incongruous coalition of Egypt and Jordan, temporary though it probably is, forms a radical/conservative core that lies at the heart of current inter-Arab relations.

2. Jordan, although small and impotent by itself, has assumed considerable importance in the Arab and Arab/Israeli equations. The principal disputed territories involved in any Arab/Israeli settlement -- the West Bank and Jerusalem -- lie in Hussein's bailiwick. The vast majority of Palestinian refugees are citizens or residents of Jordan. The Palestinian liberation groups that are the main outlet for Arab frustrations

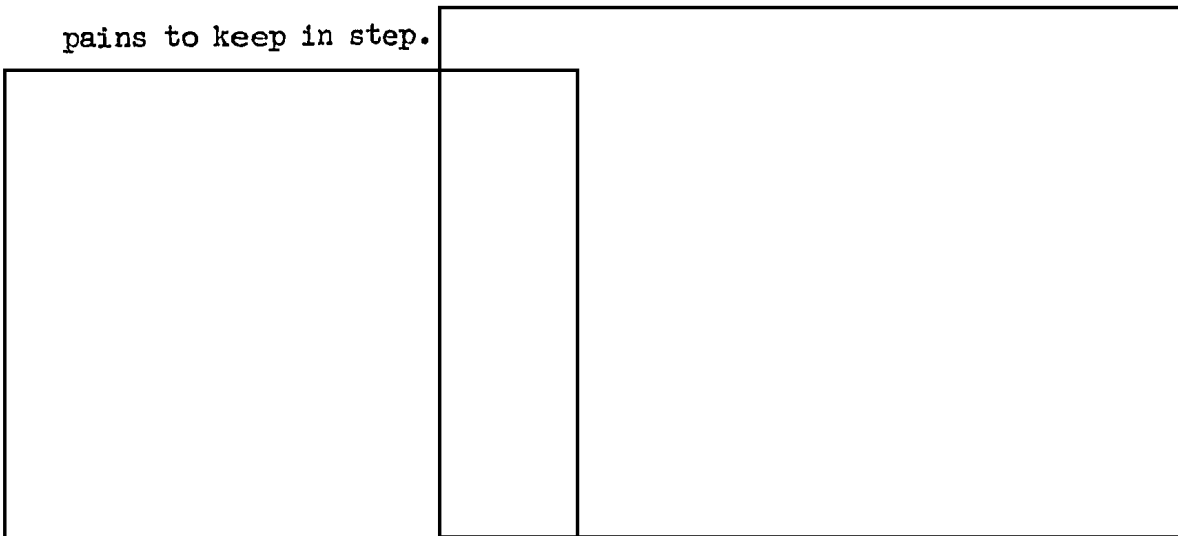
- 2 -

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NO FOREIGN DISSEM

operate largely from Jordan; Jordan bears the brunt of Israeli reprisals against Arab raiders and terrorists. Hussein and the Jordanians can win sympathy and support from Western powers, especially the United States, that the radical Arab regimes cannot begin to match. Moreover, Hussein's fellow conservatives in the Arab world will make some concessions to Hussein and Nasser together that they would not make to Nasser alone.

3. Jordan has become a focus of Arab and world attention and concern, but the center of Arab nationalism and power -- however weakened -- still rests in Cairo. In this situation, Egyptian/Jordanian relations have a considerable bearing on Middle Eastern developments. The crucial nature of this relationship is apparent to both Cairo and Amman, and Nasser and Hussein are taking great pains to keep in step.



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4. Nasser and Hussein are acting out of self-interest, not out of altruism or brotherly love. For the moment, at least, each sees the other as a necessary ally and any challenge to their solidarity as a threat to himself. Hussein's need for Nasser is based on fairly obvious considerations: Nasser is the shield against accusations (or suspicions) that he is willing to sell out the Palestinians and the Arab world for the sake of narrow Jordanian interests. Without Nasser's expressions of sympathy and support, Hussein would be even more vulnerable to internal challenges, principally from the fedayeen, and to verbal blasts from radicals throughout the Arab world. Thus, Hussein sees Nasser's attitude as a valuable prop to his own power at this juncture.

5. The relationship is not entirely one-sided, however; Nasser also derives benefits. Hussein was the closest thing to an Arab hero to emerge from the six day war. His image has

- 4 -

S-E-C-R-E-T
NO FOREIGN DISSEM

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since been somewhat tarnished by his complicated relationship with the fedayeen and by his army's obvious vulnerability to Israeli attack, but the Brave Young King confounded his detractors during the war. He put his Arabism first, losing half his country in a futile but glorious gesture; in defeat, he neither whimpered nor tried to shift the blame to others. During the first few months after the war, identifying himself with Hussein was one of the few ways that Nasser could attempt to regain some of his own lost prestige. The close relation between the two was as essential element of the Khartoum summit, which provided Nasser with the financial means to remain intransigent toward Israel. And, for Nasser as well as for Hussein, the aura of Arab solidarity was critical to the argument that there was still hope that a favorable turn of events might emerge from either diplomatic or military initiatives.

6. Nasser has continued to work with Hussein in the ensuing months, despite numerous occasions for dispute, for a number of reasons. Nasser's dependence on subsidies from Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Kuwait makes him highly sensitive to the possibility that the funds might be cut off if Egypt double-crossed Jordan.

- 5 -

S-E-C-R-E-T
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Nasser detests the Baathi movement and thus finds the regimes of both Syria and Iraq uncongenial. His long-standing feud with Feisal of Saudi Arabia has been set aside but not forgotten. Cairo's relations with both Yemens are poor, and Egypt has little in common with any of the North African countries. Jordan, therefore, is at the moment Egypt's only partner in the Arab world.

7. In addition, Jordan is Nasser's only tangible link to the Western power that matters -- the United States. While Egypt and Jordan remain united on external matters, the Arabs retain some hope that they can play off the Great Powers for Arab benefit. Nasser has long feared that the United States seeks to destroy him, but he also believes that the United States seeks to maintain Hussein in control of Jordan. Under these circumstances, he probably hopes that US attitudes toward Jordan will temper US policies toward Jordan's Arab friends and perhaps lead the US to apply some pressure on Israel for Hussein's sake.

8. To some extent, Nasser also seems likely to see Hussein as "the devil you know" -- not, perhaps, the ideal ruler for Jordan but preferable at the moment to the unknown and imponderable

- 6 -

S-E-C-R-E-T
NO FOREIGN DISSEM

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NO FOREIGN DISSEM

alternative. The domestic situation in Jordan is so complex (what with fedayeen groups of varying political affiliations, Israeli attacks, units of the Iraqi and Saudi army, Syrian forces on the border, Palestinian refugee camps bristling with weapons, Jordanian military units with questionable or divided loyalties, and a host of other considerations) that no one can predict with any assurance the sort of regime that might replace the Hashemite monarchy. It probably would be a far more radical and militant one than Hussein's but could as easily be dominated by Nasser's foes as by his friends; it probably could not maintain Jordan's role as the Arab world's link to the West, and it might not be able to maintain Jordan as an independent entity. If dominated by the fedayeen, it would pose particularly severe problems for Nasser, both as a rival for leadership of the Arab world and as the possible source of a new outbreak of war on a large scale. The doubtful outcome of a Jordanian upheaval, therefore, is probably one reason why Nasser has avoided words or actions that would encourage Hussein's actual or potential opposition forces.

9. A loss of confidence on Nasser's part in his own grasp on power may be a further consideration. In particular, he sees

- 7 -

S-E-C-R-E-T
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impending danger in any concessions to the Israelis; for example, he seems to fear the reaction of the Egyptian public to an Israeli flag vessel in the Suez Canal beyond anything that seems reasonable to more distant observers. In the context of Arab/Israeli negotiations, therefore, Nasser appears to be using Hussein as something of a stalking horse. The calculation in Cairo presumably is that Hussein should remain one or two steps in front; if he missteps and loses his throne, Cairo can disavow him. If he survives each step, however, Nasser can follow gingerly in his path.

10. The durability of the Nasser/Hussein combine is, of course, linked to the future of the two principals and complicated by all the considerations that bear on their longevity in office. Nasser appears to be in fairly firm control in Egypt, but there are many uncertainties in both his domestic situation and his foreign relations; he could fall from power at any time. Hussein's position is notably precarious and subject to a variety of pressures, including diametrically opposed demands from the fedayeen and from the Israelis. Even with Nasser and Hussein in office, moreover, the alliance remains primarily tactical and opportunistic, and mutual trust is lacking. Hussein is unlikely to have any reason to abandon

- 8 -

S-E-C-R-E-T
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Nasser in the foreseeable future. Nasser, on the other hand, probably is prepared to jettison Hussein at any time that the king moves too independently vis-a-vis Israel or precipitates an open conflict with the fedayeen.

11. On balance, the Cairo/Amman alliance probably will endure as long as Nasser and Hussein retain power and the circumstances of the Arab world's relations with Israel continue to make the alliance mutually advantageous. With the passage of time, it may even become somewhat closer. In particular, strains between Nasser and Hussein would be diminished somewhat by a more cordial atmosphere between Washington and Cairo. Expressions of Jordanian goodwill toward the USSR, such as the imminent visit of a Jordanian economic delegation to Moscow, also could help.

12. The Nasser/Hussein coalition is fundamental to Arab willingness, even grudgingly, to risk serious negotiations toward a settlement with Israel. Concomitantly, such an alliance -- especially if both felt fairly secure at home -- would be as strong a negotiating team as the Arabs could hope for, and the least desirable negotiating situation the Israelis can envisage.

- 9 -

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